

### Remarks/Arguments

Claims 12-17 were rejected as being unpatentable over Watatani in view of Huffman et al. or Xu et al. for the reasons stated at pages 2-3 of the Office Action.

By this Amendment, independent claims 12 and 14 have been revised to clarify that the ashing process of the claimed invention is carried out in the absence of fluorine. Please see the description of the third embodiment appearing in the present specification.

Each of Huffman et al. and Xu et al. include fluorine as a principle component of the ashing gases described therein. As such, even if Huffman et al. and/or Xu et al. is combined with Watatani in the fashion suggested by the Examiner, the resultant combination(s) would still be distinct from the presently claimed invention.

No other issues remaining, reconsideration and favorable action upon the claims 12-17 now pending in the application are requested.

Respectfully submitted,

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